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ABSTRACT

Whether or not a student drops out of school is partly determined by his achievement orientation, two components of which (achievement motivation and achievement-related values) have their antecendents in the family. A stratified random sample by father's occupation was made of families of secondary school male graduates and dropouts in Ontario. Visits to the home were conducted by one experimenter who followed a systematic routine. Each session required about two to three hours in order to gather the sets of data which consisted of: questionnaires; five stories written by each boy in response to five Thematic Apperception Test-like pictures which were used to obtain a measure of achievement motivation; and, a tape-recorded discussion between the mother-father-son over issues about which participants had indicated opinion differences in response to the questionnaire. It was concluded that the more highly educated mothers of the graduates may have been able to establish for their sons optimum conditions for inculcating both achievement motivation and achievement-related values. It is suggested that there is a need for studies that will make operational the intervening linkages between family structure, adolescent personality, and school behavior postulated in this study. (JM)

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FAMILY INTERACTION, ACHIEVEMENT-VALUES AND MOTIVATION AS RELATED TO SCHOOL DROPOUTS

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Introduction

This report is based on a study designed to relate specitic socialization experiences in the family with two presumably important components of adolescent boys' achievement orientation. Supporting data and details of procedures used are omitted for the sake of brevity.

A review of the literature on dropouts revealed that descriptive surveys have related a large number of diverse factors to early school withdrawal. To help comprehend the diversity of findings from these surveys an explanatory position was developed based on socio-psychological theory. The theory proposed that two personal attributes would distinguish between intellectually capable male adolescent dropouts and their graduate counterparts.

The two attributes chosen were achievement motivation (McClelland, et al, 1953) and achievement-related values (Strodtbeck, 1958). Each of these characteristics was considered to be an important component of an achievement orientation, the possession of which was central to school perseverance. These factors were chosen not only because research has provided some evidence to link them to school performance, but also has linked them to their antecedents in the family.

Achievement Motivation and Parental Child-Rearing Practices

Achievement motivation is considered to be an enduring, deep-rooted desire, about which an individual may be unaware, to strive to meet achievement standards. It is presumed to be learned early in life as a result of particular kinds of maternal child-rearing practices. High achievement motivation is presumed to be inculcated in children as a result of mothers placing an early stress on the child to be self-reliant and master various developmental tasks. Presently, it is unclear what specific role fathers may play in developing achievement motivation.

Family Power Relationships and Sons' Achievement-Related Values

The second component of an achievement orientation was presumed to be achievement-related values. Strodtbeck (1958) has shown that achievement-values which place an emphasis on planning and hard work, a preference for individual accomplishment, and a willingness to defer gratification in order to pursue an education or a career, are associated with a power balance in family interaction. That is, if a disproportionate share of decision-winning power about day-by-day events in family life is held by fathers, sons seem less likely to incorporate achievement-values, whether or not these values are held by one or both parents. Strodtbeck's procedure was used in this study to provide both the distribution of decision-winning power among father-mother-son triads as well as the amount that each family member participated in a series of experimental discussions.

Parental Attitudes Towards Child-Rearing Practices

In order to supplement the information obtained from the family discussions, parental attitudes towards child-rearing practices were also

sampled by means of the Parental Attitude Research Instrument (Schaeffer & Bell, 1958; Zuckerman, et al, 1958).

Relationship of the Broader Culture on Parental Attitudes and Values

Finally, it was decided to sample parental educational attainment and the fathers' occupations since sociologists have argued that through educational and occupational differences the broader culture affects children indirectly by the way these factors act on parental attitudes and values.

Postulates

It was postulated that there were differences between capable male adolescent dropouts and graduates in terms of:

(1) two personal attributes, achievement motivation and achievement related values, assumed to be the two major components of an achievement orientation important to school perseverance;

(2) specific child-rearing practices and experiences with power relationships in the family which were assumed to underlie the development of each of the components of this achievement orientation; and

(3) parental education and fathers' occupations which were presumed to influence parental child-rearing attitudes and behavior.

Method

Subjects

A random sample of thirty dropout and thirty graduate family triads (mother-father-son) was selected from "middle" and "working" class strata in an industrial Ontario community. Stratification was based on the

occupations of the fathers. The sample was selected from a group of 62 dropout and 70 graduate families which remained following screening and attrition from an original population of 451 families.

The two groups were defined in terms of the school status of the son, as follows:

1. Dropout families. A dropout was defined as a boy who had enrolled in a program of studies leading to an Ontario Secondary School diploma, but who had withdrawn from the program during the academic year preceding the study, and at the time contacted had not re-enrolled in any school program. Withdrawals for reasons of health were not included.

2. Graduate families. A graduate was defined as a boy who had just received the Ontario Secondary School diploma.

All the boys were of average IQ as measured by the Standard Otis or the Henman-Nelson Group Test. Each family triad consisted of both the natural parents and either the dropout or graduate son.

Procedure

Visits to the home were conducted by one experimenter who followed a systematic routine. Each session required about two to three hours in order to gather the sets of data which consisted of: (a) questionnaires; (b) five stories written by each boy in response to five TAT-like pictures which were used to obtain a measure of achievement motivation; and (c) a tape-recorded interaction between the mother-father-son. The latter involved obtaining a sample discussion between the family members over issues about which participants had indicated opinion differences in response to a questionnaire (Strodtbeck, 1958). These "revealed differences" provided the basis for forming up nine sets of coalitions in which each member of the

family was isolated three times in succession. That is, each member confronted a coalition of the other two, three times. The family was instructed to talk the items over on which there was some disagreement and try to agree on the one choice which would best represent the opinion of the family. An individual's power score was based on the weighted frequency with which each member was able to convince the other members to agree with him on the item under discussion.

These recorded interactions and the achievement motivation protocols were transcribed by stenographic staff in preparation for scoring.

Findings and Discussion

After scoring, a statistical analysis was conducted to test 19 directional hypotheses using a multiple linear regression technique.

The major findings of the study were that:

1. there were no differences between the dropouts and graduates in achievement motivation;
2. graduates and their mothers more likely subscribed to achievement-related values than did the dropouts and their mothers;
3. the graduates realized more egalitarian relationships with their parents in family discussions than did the dropouts;
4. the graduates' mothers were better educated, subscribed to more democratic attitudes towards child-rearing practices, and were less demanding than the dropouts' mothers; and
5. there were no differences between the dropouts' and graduates' fathers in occupational or educational status.

Conclusion

It was concluded that the more highly educated mothers of the graduates

may have been able to establish for their sons optimum conditions for inculcating both achievement motivation and achievement-related values. In addition, what seemed important for nurturing these values was not that both parents necessarily subscribe to them, but rather that the communication relations in family interaction maximize the possibilities of the sons to influence family decision-making.

It is suggested that there is a need for studies that will operationalize the intervening linkages between family structure, adolescent personality, and school behavior postulated in this study. Results from this study suggest four research and development areas.

1. Power and communication relations. Strodtbeck (1958) postulated that a relative impotence in family interaction would generalize to feelings of inadequacy outside the home. Therefore, it could be argued that the graduates, having realized more success in dealing with power relations in family interaction, may have been more willing to accept the legitimacy of the teachers' power in the classroom. Egalitarian experience with power relations in the home, then, might have enabled them to see the role of power when judiciously used and might have facilitated their playing the "power game" in the classroom, the net effect of which was to be more tolerant of the realities of the school environment.

Also, the "revealed differences" approach used in this study assumes that basic role-playing behavior repeatedly used in the past is recalled and is manifest in tape-recorded family interaction when the family group is operating to resolve a revealed difference of opinion. Therefore, age differences between the children being compared, as well as their experiences outside the family, are considered not to be crucial determinants of manifest

patterns of family interaction. However, the complexities of the determinants of family power balance, in addition to those stemming from a concern to maintain a sense of family cohesion, may differ as a function of the stage of the life cycle of the family, and of the particular ordinal position of the child involved. Hence, notions elaborated in this study require testing on other age groups, and with other children within the same family, and longitudinal studies using other sets of conflict-generating items.

2. Parental role in child-rearing. The findings suggested that an important maternal role may be to impart standards of excellence and achievement-related values to their sons in an accepting, open communication climate.

Also, mothers may play an important role in maintaining harmony in family interaction and in establishing the conditions that help their husbands exercise constraint in the application of social power. The important paternal function, rather than bringing the requirements of the adult's world into the home and providing status, may be more concerned with the discreet expression of power in family interaction.

3. Achievement-related values. Strodtbeck's (1958) achievement-values scale appears to contain elements similar to scales used to measure sources of reinforcement responsibility or control beliefs. The relevance of sources of behavioral control has been related by Kogan and Wallach (1967) to Atkinson's (1966) views of achievement motivation, in order to help account for irrational shifts in aspiration level and performance following failure experiences. The findings from this study indicate that further research does seem warranted to relate measures of sources of control both to postulated antecedents in the family, to n-Ach, and to other constructs such as "motivational disturbance" (Kogan and Wallach, 1967), which seem

particularly cogent to predicting achievement-related school behavior of adolescent boys.

4. Individualization of the schools. Efforts to increase the real influence of boys in their homes hopefully would be accompanied by a concomitant shift in their achievement-value orientation and an increase in their influence and competence in and perception of school. However, because of the difficulties likely to beset any real intervention in families, a more viable alternative might be to operate radically on the school environment. If it can be assumed that the power and/or reward system in the world of work, of school, and of the home of the dropout boys (but not of graduate boys) are incongruent, then mere well-intentioned efforts to proliferate course offerings, without significantly changing the context in which they are offered, will be less than adequate. Moreover, attempts to offer incentives to boys in the form of delayed abstract "rewards" for achievement in school, while at the same time constantly reminding them of their powerlessness, is not likely to alter the overt achievement behavior of dropout-prone boys. It is felt that if more flexible, socially responsive schools were provided which were able to deal seriously with such non-ability factors as achievement-related values, then significant changes in the holding power of schools might be realized.

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